Theory

Debate theory is a set of ideas about how debate ought to be. Theory arguments utilize these concepts as their warrants. Theory is a procedural argument that functions as a check against abuse: they’re infused in almost every framework and standards debate.

You run theory for two main reasons: either your opponent is running abusive arguments, or you can try to frame the debate round. Most framing of the round is done academically, but that mindset is harmful because it doesn’t weigh preferability. Both criteria will almost always be relevant to the round, and warrants can be difficult to take down: theory allows you to resolve the framework debate.

Judges who won’t vote off theory are foolish. First, that has negative ramifications on the activity, but second, the view contradicts many of their other views of debate rounds. (Rejecting new arguments is a theory principle about the lack of fairness of new arguments in the 2AR.) Not liking theory means not liking bad use of theory or not liking unnecessary theory.

Interpretations provide ideas of what debate ought to be. Violations explain how your opponent breaks the interpretation and exactly what positions meet / do not meet. Make sure that if you run multiple theory arguments, they aren’t mutually exclusive. Standards are reasons to prefer your interpretation. Voting issues are fairness and education; the impact is reject the argument or debater.

Three problems with education-based theory arguments: It is generally very hard to prove a bright-line for how much education must exist in a debate round because unless education is a maximization framework, then we need to cap a limit somewhere. Second, it is very hard to prove that education on the topic comes from in-round experience rather than outside the round via research and writing. Finally, even if you can prove education is more important than fairness, it is difficult to differentiate between breadth and depth.

Fairness is a voter: Competitive activities need rules that are fair to both parties. Fairness is necessary for debate’s existence because if rounds are unfair, it is a pre-requisite to any other goal of debate.

Why unfair debaters should lose: Having to run theory skews the substantive debate because it is a time suck which means my opponent still has an advantage from being abusive. If fairness is not a voter, then theory will be a zero risk issue and debaters can be abusive with no negative consequences, which means abuse will run rampant.

Why fairness is not a voting issue: Rejecting the debater is disproportionate, but rejecting the argument establishes fair parameters for the round but still allows me to win legitimately. Voting on fairness requires intervention.

Education is more important than fairness: Debate is an extra-curricular activity. Education affects us outside the 42 minutes of a debate round.

Generally, all standards that link to fairness will deal with predictable ground or division of ground.

There are two main approaches to a fairness debate: competing interpretations and the conjunctions approach. Competing interpretations argues that you ought to prefer the better interpretation regardless of any in-round abuse.

Three forms of abuse: Potential abuse is when a position opens the door for them to do something abusive. In-round abuse is when the debater has actually done something abusive in the round. Articulated abuse is when a debater can articulate the ground they’ve lost.

Answering theory: You can answer any part of the shell, and that is usually sufficient to take it out. Answering the voter can be strategic, but the argument may still be excluded. Meeting the violation is always a good strategy because if you don’t violate the interpretation, then standards and voters don’t matter. If you aren’t meeting the interpretation, and theory is a voting issue, then you need a counter-interpretation. After the counter-interpretation, attack their standards, turn their standards, or run counter-standards.

RVI: RVIs say that my opponent should win just for running theory or say that if I win theory, you should vote for me. Having to answer theory is a time-suck. I had to dedicate critical speech time to answering theory and because of that, I’m now behind in the substantive debate. Also, theory needs to be a two-way street to prevent erroneous use of theory because if it’s a no-risk argument, then people will run lots of blippy theory. Many people feel that theory is only a gateway issue to winning and thus don’t like RVIs. RVIs prevent your opponent from running theory. You can also make decision-rule responses to theory such as, “Unless you’re 100% sure that my opponent is winning theory, then don’t vote for theory.”